

## COMMERCIALLY SEXUALLY EXPLOITED CHILDREN – SEATTLE AND KING COUNTY

### **Maria's Story**

*By a survivor who now works with commercially sexually exploited youth in King County*

I began my education in the sex industry when I was 17 years old. This was certainly not an idea that I came up with myself, but I was a perfect victim for a pimp in search of a new source of money. I was addicted to drugs and alcohol and was living with a friend in an apartment at the time I met Johnny, who would later become my pimp. That is where my learning experience began, and I continued to learn for the entire 15 years I was working in different levels in the industry.

I worked on the streets, in escort services and was a stripper for many years as well. They are all different ways to work as a prostitute but the same rules apply. It is a sick game that is continually happening today.

Because of my experience with my pimp, I can connect with many girls involved today because the game hasn't changed. The feelings are real and nobody understands unless they have been there. I understand how a young girl could be in love with a man who beats her, makes her prostitute herself and calls her names.

I had been an addict for quite some time when I met Johnny, having begun abusing drugs and alcohol at age 12. I never had a good relationship with my father and never felt that he loved me, which is why I think I started using drugs and alcohol in the first place. My father is an alcoholic who showed me no affection growing up. Physical and emotional abuse was all I had ever experienced from a man, starting with my father.

Johnny came over to the apartment where I was living one night. He was very nicely dressed, smelled good, drove a nice car and had the right words all the time. He told me that I was too beautiful to be living in that crappy apartment, without nice things, and much too beautiful to be doing drugs. I was flattered that a guy that seemed to have so much (materially) would want to talk to me the way he did. He told me he wanted to be with me but I would have to stop doing drugs, which I vowed to stop at that moment. Besides, I had something new to be addicted to, and that made me feel really good. That was Johnny. He was a God to me; he was my savior from the crappy life I was living.

Johnny started coming around every day, taking me to nice restaurants, paying to get my nails done, buying me new clothes, and doing all the things that a 17-year-old girl, who had already experienced a pretty rough life, thought was her "way out" of poverty.

He used to tell me he was a pimp but I really did not know what that meant and did not take him seriously, until he began to tell me that if I wanted to continue to live this glamorous life I was going to have to become his "ho." I hated it when he would talk about that and, in some

delusional way, I thought he would really fall in love with me and not want me to do those things.

Johnny began hitting me and emotionally abusing me almost immediately but he said it was because he loved me and he wanted to teach me to act the right way. He said I made him do it, and I believed him. Why would I think any different since my father did and said the same things?

Johnny told me he was going to drive to Hollywood for a vacation and wanted me to come along. I was so excited! Hollywood was so glamorous and I just knew the moment I got there some big director would see me and I would become a big star. I agreed to go, and off we went to Hollywood.

When we got to Hollywood, the first thing he did was take my I.D. and tell me that I was going to make him some money. He made me understand that I had to go out on Sunset Boulevard and bring him back some money, or he was not only going to leave me there, he was also going to beat me really badly.

I was scared to death. I put on a short mini skirt, tank top and high heels and was made to go out there. Johnny was so excited that I was going to trick for the first time that he began telling me how perfect our lives were going to be and ordered me to (perform a sex act on him) before I left. Off I went to sell my body to strangers for money. It was scary, at first, and I felt horrible, but I would do anything for Johnny's approval.

But I never did get that approval. It was never enough, there was always a reason to beat me, and I was never what he wanted me to be, even when I brought him lots of money.

I came into the relationship with nothing and left it with PTSD, panic attacks, depression and many battle wounds including a broken heart. It was only years later that I realized that all Johnny would ever be is a pimp.